

EVERYTHING IS EDUCATIONAL

There are children's shows out there that set out purely to entertain. There are shows out there that aim to educate. There are shows out there that try to do both. Those shows gave us one of the most hideous words in the English language - *edutainment*.

Well I just don't like it when they put two words together like that. A personal bugbear perhaps but it stinks of boardroom. Suits. People with graphs and powerpoint. Synergy. Not people who make children smile.

Sure, children can learn while they have fun

But I just don't buy that any child was ever *edutained*.

Some shows aim to educate, others don't. But both parents and programme makers need to realise one very important thing -

Everything is educational.

Everything.

Children learn at a phenomenal rate. They are processing levels of information that would baffle most adults. They aren't only learning when you *choose* to teach them.

Everything a child hears or sees goes to contribute towards their world view. Forms part of their outlook on life. Shapes who they are.

Everything is educational.

THE PROBLEM

The problem is, when programme makers are not actively trying to educate, when we're just going for the fun factor, we are turning control of what the audience learns from a show over to chance, fates, gods, whatever.

Children will come away with something they didn't have before, but we don't know what that will be.

And, knowing our luck, it won't be good.

PARENTS ALREADY KNOW THIS

Children can overhear a half-hour conversation and the only thing they'll come away with is the swear word. I've taught my own girls quite a few. Often, watching a television show where the writer has milked the drama of a sorrowful moment only to have it replaced by a joyous victory, the child will only remember the sorrow. That story where the big scary troll turns out to be nice after all? You can bet you're going to be hearing about that 'naughty troll' afterwards.

Sesame Street had to retire Kermit's song, 'Being Green', because research showed that many children missed that he was actually fine with being green at the end. All they got was that he was unhappy being green – the exact *opposite* of the intended message.

Everything is educational.

But trying to figure out just what we're teaching them is a nightmare.

That is why it's important for parents to be sure about what your children are watching. I know it's not always possible but try to watch shows with them when you can. And programme-makers, writers, animators - the responsibility we take on when creating content for children should never be taken lightly. Unlike the parents, we can't say who will be watching our shows, when, where or under what conditions.

But children *will* take something away with them.

Let's make it something good.

But, please, call it something other than edutainment.